

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

- 5 1. A method for managing user status values in an instant messaging system, wherein the user status values indicate the availability of a user to participate in an instant messaging session, the method comprising:
 - 10 receiving a first request from a user to designate the user status value that is associated with the user such that a group of one or more users cannot initiate a new instant messaging session with the user; and
 - 15 receiving a second request from the user to designate a subset of the group of one or more users such that the subset of the group of one or more users is authorized to initiate a new instant messaging session with the user while a remainder of the group of one or more users cannot initiate a new instant messaging session with the user.
- 20 2. The method of claim 1 further comprising:
 - 25 receiving a request from an other user to initiate a new instant messaging session with the user; and
 - in response to a determination that the other user is not included in the subset of the group of one or more users, denying a new instant messaging session with the user.

3. The method of claim 1 further comprising:

receiving a request from an other user to initiate a new instant messaging session with the user; and

5 in response to a determination that the other user is included in the subset of the group of one or more users, starting a new instant messaging session with the user.

4. The method of claim 1 further comprising:

10 displaying information associated with a buddy object within a window of the instant messaging application, wherein a buddy object represents an other user in the group of one or more users;

receiving a request from a user to designate the
15 buddy object as being included within the subset of the group of one or more users; and

in response to receiving the request from the user, displaying information associated with the buddy object in the window of the instant messaging application that
20 indicates that the buddy object is authorized to initiate a new instant messaging session with the user.

5. The method of claim 1 further comprising:

displaying information associated with a group of
buddy objects within a window of the instant messaging
application, wherein a buddy object represents an other
5 user in the group of one or more users;

receiving a request from a user to designate the
group of buddy objects as being included within the
subset of the group of one or more users; and

10 in response to receiving the request from the user,
displaying information associated with the group of buddy
objects in the window of the instant messaging
application that indicates that the group of buddy
objects is authorized to initiate a new instant messaging
session with the user.

6. A computer program product on a computer readable medium for managing user status values in an instant messaging system, wherein the user status values indicate the availability of a user to participate in an instant messaging session, the computer program product
5 comprising:

means for receiving a first request from a user to designate the user status value that is associated with the user such that a group of one or more users cannot
10 initiate a new instant messaging session with the user;
and

means for receiving a second request from the user to designate a subset of the group of one or more users such that the subset of the group of one or more users is
15 authorized to initiate a new instant messaging session with the user while a remainder of the group of one or more users cannot initiate a new instant messaging session with the user.

20 7. The computer program product of claim 6 further comprising:

means for receiving a request from an other user to initiate a new instant messaging session with the user;
and

25 means for denying a new instant messaging session with the user in response to a determination that the other user is not included in the subset of the group of one or more users.

8. The computer program product of claim 6 further comprising:

means for receiving a request from an other user to initiate a new instant messaging session with the user;
5 and

means for starting a new instant messaging session with the user in response to a determination that the other user is included in the subset of the group of one or more users.

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9. The computer program product of claim 6 further comprising:

means for displaying information associated with a buddy object within a window of the instant messaging application, wherein a buddy object represents an other
15 user in the group of one or more users;

means for receiving a request from a user to designate the buddy object as being included within the subset of the group of one or more users; and

20 means for displaying information associated with the buddy object in the window of the instant messaging application that indicates that the buddy object is authorized to initiate a new instant messaging session with the user in response to receiving the request from
25 the user.

10. The computer program product of claim 6 further comprising:

means for displaying information associated with a group of buddy objects within a window of the instant messaging application, wherein a buddy object represents
5 an other user in the group of one or more users;

means for receiving a request from a user to designate the group of buddy objects as being included within the subset of the group of one or more users; and

10 means for displaying information associated with the group of buddy objects in the window of the instant messaging application that indicates that the group of buddy objects is authorized to initiate a new instant messaging session with the user in response to receiving
15 the request from the user.

11. An apparatus for managing user status values in an instant messaging system, wherein the user status values indicate the availability of a user to participate in an instant messaging session, the apparatus comprising:

5 means for receiving a first request from a user to designate the user status value that is associated with the user such that a group of one or more users cannot initiate a new instant messaging session with the user; and

10 means for receiving a second request from the user to designate a subset of the group of one or more users such that the subset of the group of one or more users is authorized to initiate a new instant messaging session with the user while a remainder of the group of one or
15 more users cannot initiate a new instant messaging session with the user.

12. The apparatus of claim 11 further comprising:

 means for receiving a request from an other user to
20 initiate a new instant messaging session with the user; and

 means for denying a new instant messaging session with the user in response to a determination that the other user is not included in the subset of the group of
25 one or more users.

13. The apparatus of claim 11 further comprising:

means for receiving a request from an other user to initiate a new instant messaging session with the user; and

5 means for starting a new instant messaging session with the user in response to a determination that the other user is included in the subset of the group of one or more users.

10 14. The apparatus of claim 11 further comprising:

means for displaying information associated with a buddy object within a window of the instant messaging application, wherein a buddy object represents an other user in the group of one or more users;

15 means for receiving a request from a user to designate the buddy object as being included within the subset of the group of one or more users; and

means for displaying information associated with the buddy object in the window of the instant messaging
20 application that indicates that the buddy object is authorized to initiate a new instant messaging session with the user in response to receiving the request from the user.

15. The apparatus of claim 11 further comprising:

means for displaying information associated with a group of buddy objects within a window of the instant messaging application, wherein a buddy object represents
5 an other user in the group of one or more users;

means for receiving a request from a user to designate the group of buddy objects as being included within the subset of the group of one or more users; and

means for displaying information associated with the
10 group of buddy objects in the window of the instant messaging application that indicates that the group of buddy objects is authorized to initiate a new instant messaging session with the user in response to receiving the request from the user.